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OFFICE OF
NATIONAL ESTIMATES

MEMORANDUM

Implications for European Detente of the Czechoslovak Trials

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7 September 1972

Copy No. 122

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Approved For Release 2007/03/06 : CIA-RDP79R00967A000500020003-5

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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY

OFFICE OF NATIONAL ESTIMATES

7 September 1972

MEMORANDUM

SUBJECT: Implications for European Detente of the Czechoslovak Trials*

The trials and convictions of a number of individuals prominent during the "Prague Spring" of 1968 has attracted considerable unfavorable publicity in Western Europe, in Communist as well as non-Communist circles. The vehement criticism and its appearance not long before the onset of prolonged East-West negotiations in Europe raise the question of how much political repression in Czechoslovakia is likely to affect these negotiations and the general development of detente in Europe.

* *This memorandum was prepared by the Office of National Estimates and discussed with other components of the CIA, who are in general agreement with its judgments.*

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The Issues

1. From mid-July through mid-August Czechoslovak courts convicted 46 people of offenses against the state and handed down penalties ranging from a few suspended sentences up to maximum verdicts of six-and-a-half years imprisonment. Legal proceedings against ten others were dropped by order of President Ludvik Svoboda, and apparently no new trials are scheduled at this time. The concern here is not primarily with the cases themselves, but with the shadow they cast over the rest of Europe, which otherwise seems to be basking in the warm rays of detente.

2. Criticism of the trials from abroad has developed on three levels. First, the fact that a number of the defendants were Communists who held influential positions when Alexander Dubcek was Party First Secretary (January 1968-April 1969), and lost these positions almost as soon as Gustav Husak replaced him, has led a number of critics to allege that the regime has punished these people *ex post facto*, that is, for their activities under Dubcek. A second line of criticism concedes that the defendants may have engaged in anti-regime activities in the post-Dubcek era, but challenges the notion that these offenses were serious enough to require judicial punishment. The third line is more general:

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the trials are said by some Western observers to raise the question of how seriously Eastern pretensions to detente can be taken when Prague behaves this harshly toward its own citizens and Moscow sanctions such behavior.

3. The "organs of bourgeois propaganda", such as the London *Times*, *Die Zeit* of Hamburg, and Milan's *Corriere Della Sera*, have publicized the trials extensively and both Prague and Moscow have deemed it necessary to issue specific rebuttals. The *Times*, for example, struck a vulnerable spot by describing those sentenced as among the best of Eastern Europe's scientists, intellectuals and artists, and then suggesting that a number of proposals for the normalization of East-West relations, including reciprocal arrangements in science, culture, and so forth, had now become pointless. *Die Zeit* was particularly offensive, according to Czechoslovak media, both by claiming that the trials demonstrated "the illusions about the all-European conference", and by publishing a Czechoslovak emigre's appeal to the American Communist, Angela Davis, to intercede

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for the defendants.* Other non-Communist media, particularly in Italy and France, have combined their criticism of the trials with reflections on the fourth anniversary of the invasion itself, and on the hazards of letting Communists into Western governments. A report of a protest by 38 Soviet dissidents to President Svoboda has also received considerable Western press coverage.

4. The official Czechoslovak version has it that the 46 defendants were guilty of engaging in organized anti-regime activities *after* Dubcek was removed. Prague has not denied that other Czechoslovaks have been, or may be, sentenced for activities during the Dubcek era. But it insists that no persons have been,

* *Miss Davis's blunt refusal, conveyed through a spokesman in London, added that much more to the trial publicity. Meanwhile, one of her court-appointed lawyers travelled on his own initiative to Prague, and then declared at a press conference in Vienna that he regarded the conduct of the trials as intolerable. He added that he had told Czechoslovak officials that the relevant parts of the penal code were so generalized that "by that standard I could prosecute anyone for anything. . . . They are in conflict with human dignity. The judicial process in Czechoslovakia is a total failure, and would not be tolerated for one day in the United States."*

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or will be, punished merely for their political opinions.* And Prague accuses its critics abroad of attempting to use the issue of the trials in an effort "to torpedo an all-European conference", and to hide "their own dirty linen" (e.g., Vietnam and Northern Ireland).

Background of the Trials

5. When Dubcek was finally cast aside, in April 1969, the new regime launched a process of political "normalization". This has not involved the use of violence on a large scale against the population, but it has resulted in sweeping personnel changes and the imposition of pre-1968 controls (and a few others) on political,

* Four Czechoslovaks are known to have been sentenced for their activities in the 1968-1969 period. One of these, Jaroslav Brodsky, now an emigre, was sentenced in absentia for founding the club of former political prisoners, K-231. The three actually serving terms are General Vaclav Prohlik, who denounced Soviet domination of the Warsaw Pact in July 1968 and cast his parliamentary vote against ratification of the occupation agreement that November; Vladimir Skutina, a former television commentator who publicly castigated the Soviets on several occasions from October 1968 to April 1969; and Jiri Lederer, who was convicted in February 1972 of slandering another "socialist" state, Poland. (Lederer's offense was to publish a series of articles in the spring of 1968 attacking the Gomulka regime's repression of Jews; if he were writing the same thing in Poland today, he probably would not be punished and he might be published.)

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economic, and cultural activities. And the Husak regime had indicated long before these trials that (like every other Bloc Communist regime) it simply would not tolerate organized domestic political opposition.

6. Information [] supports the 25X1
Husak regime's public claim that the defendants had participated in organized, anti-regime activity in the post-Dubcek period. The organization, calling itself the "Socialist Movement of Czechoslovak Citizens", exchanged anti-regime materials with Czechoslovak emigres, many of whom had held important positions under Dubcek. Moreover, the "Movement" apparently had some success in mobilizing popular opposition to the November 1971 parliamentary elections. Despite the regime's public announcement of 99 plus percent participation and endorsement, it is estimated [] 25X1

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7. Moscow's reactions to the defendants' activities and its role in the preparation of the trials are not clear. Moscow has consistently pressed the Czechoslovak regime to move


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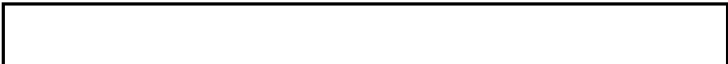
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ahead with "normalization", and it is a safe bet that the organization of an election boycott and extensive contacts with emigres are inconsistent with the Soviet concept of "normalization". At a minimum, then, the Soviets probably gave their explicit approval for the trials, though they were no doubt anxious to minimize possible adverse reactions in the West. Indeed, there is information 

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 that the Soviets indicated to the Czechoslovak leadership their concern for minimizing "public" reaction to the trials, advised that the defendants be disposed of in a series of small trials rather than in one big extravaganza, and suggested that the least conspicuous time for these would be July or August, i.e., well before the convening of CSCE preliminaries.

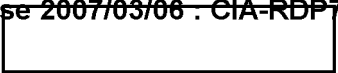
Western Communist Reactions

8. Perhaps somewhat to the Soviets' surprise, some of the strongest criticism of the trial has come from the Western Communist Parties, particularly from the Italian and French Parties. The Italian Party's reaction, expressed in the theoretical weekly *Rinascita*, has been quite sharp:

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It is the first time that there have been political trials of Communists who participated in or supported the Czechoslovak new course. Up until now, these comrades were harshly hit with procedures against which the Italian CP protested vigorously, but they were never submitted to trials and to penal sentences. The difference is profound, and full of political consequences not only for Czechoslovakia but for the entire Communist movement.

9. The French Party's statement, as published in *L'Humanite*, represented the strongest official criticism of Czechoslovak developments by this Party since its 1968 protest against the invasion itself. In particular, *L'Humanite* claimed that in February 1972 Husak gave one of the Party's representatives explicit assurances that no "political trials" of any kind would be held in Czechoslovakia -- assurances which the Party published immediately. At a minimum, therefore, the French Communists felt they had to speak out in order to ward off this new threat to their credibility with the French electorate.

10. The French Party was also under pressure from its Socialist coalition partners, who emphasized that the Communist Party's attitude toward Czechoslovakia would remain the touchstone of its commitment to "political pluralism". Socialist Party leader Mitterand went beyond this by proposing to invite leading Dubcek supporters in Czechoslovakia as well as chiefs of "foreign

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socialist parties" to meet in France next January, and by announcing his intention to call on Brandt in Bonn and Brezhnev in Moscow this fall, presumably to discuss Czechoslovak developments. (Whether he really means to do this is quite another question.) The French Party has also felt renewed pressure from its own dissidents, such as Garaudy, who, like the regular Italian Party leaders, had maintained contacts with many figures who were put on trial.

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resident Svoboda's pardon-

ing of the 10 other defendants (who were relatively small fry in any case) may have been a gesture to the Western Parties.

Official Western Reactions

12. But on the official, governmental level, no European government has undertaken significant changes in its policy toward Czechoslovakia or the USSR because of the trials. The sternest official response to date has been Luxembourg's decision to cancel the September visit of Foreign Ministry Secretary-General Wurth

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to Prague (he will proceed with his scheduled visit to Budapest). This is more than counterbalanced, even on the diplomatic level, by the fact that several months ago London invited the Czechoslovak Foreign Minister to discuss European security and other topics, and at the beginning of August (as the trials were nearing an end), the British announced (reportedly with relief) that Prague had agreed to send him. And the subject of the trials has not encroached upon NATO's ongoing discussions regarding various aspects of a European security conference or MBFR.

13. Ordinarily the Yugoslav regime, with its sharp reflex for East European dramas, might have said a great deal. But Belgrade's voice has been quite muted, chiefly because it has been conducting its own trials of dissident elements -- e.g., Croatian nationalists -- and handing out sentences hardly less severe than the Czechoslovak courts. Both the Czechoslovak press and certain Western media (e.g., *Le Monde* and the *Manchester Guardian*) have attempted to draw parallels between the Czechoslovak and Yugoslav trials.

14. The two capitals in which a strongly adverse reaction to Czechoslovak developments could have a significant impact on

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East-West reactions are Bonn and Paris. Brandt has issued a mild public expression of unhappiness (tailored to the fourth anniversary of the invasion), but whatever compassion he may feel for the Czechs, he is not likely to do much more than he has so far. He is facing a very close election, and needs to demonstrate the success, and practical benefits, of Ostpolitik. At the moment he is concentrating on securing a general treaty with East Germany, but the next item on the agenda is to "normalize" relations with Prague, which depends on achieving a mutually satisfactory formula on the invalidity of the Munich Agreement.

15. Paris remains as interested as ever in preserving its own "special relationship" with Moscow. French officials have already stressed in private that the Czechoslovak "problem" will not be allowed to jeopardize that relationship. Moreover, the French are continuing to press for an early meeting on European security at the ministerial level, where they might assert the position of champion of the smaller states of Europe against "super-power hegemony" and thereby regain some of the detente spotlight lately monopolized by Washington and Bonn.

16. Elsewhere in Western Europe, there are several precariously placed governments who want to be seen by their electorates

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to be involved in the detente process. They are not greatly interested in domestic developments in Czechoslovakia. Rather, they are concerned with expanding the detente forum to preclude the possibility that the US and the USSR will deal over their heads. West European grumbling about a Washington "sellout" in the Moscow communique underscores how seriously this possibility is regarded in some quarters.

Implications

17. Official non-reactions to the trials should not be surprising from governments for whom the invasion of Czechoslovakia itself was (in the words of de Gaulle's foreign minister) no more than "a traffic accident on the road to detente". Lack of official West European response to the trials clearly demonstrates the size of the Western investment in the detente process. It also shows that when the large and medium powers are searching for detente, they are not likely to pause for very long to listen to the quarrels among the Communists and journalists of a small one.

18. Indeed, this reticence to criticize an Eastern European regime's internal political manipulations seems likely to continue as long as Western interest in detente persists. And

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the detente process promises to be a long one. Czechoslovakia, should it continue or intensify its persecution of political opponents, might precipitate some official denunciation or find itself less favorably treated than other East European states in matters of trade or credits, but on the whole this seems unlikely so long as detente appears to the Western governments to offer prospects for success.

19. Some leftists in Europe will of course remain sensitive to future developments in Czechoslovakia -- e.g., to any further misfortunes of Dubcek himself, or of someone like Josef Smrkovsky, former Chairman of the Federal Assembly. Czechoslovak emigres will see to that. The Western Communist Parties will not wish to keep beating the drum, but they will be forced to react, at least publicly, to any obvious stifling of internal dissent in Central Europe. And each reaction adds one more small step in the evolution of the Western Parties away from strict adherence to Moscow's line.

20. What these trials may foreshadow as wider contacts between Eastern and Western Europe materialize is less clear. The Czech situation has some unique features; the opposition was organized and aggressive, the country itself had a functioning democratic regime before the Communists seized control, and the

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pressures for diluting one-party government were greater there than anywhere else in Eastern Europe. Whether or not these trials were intended as a demonstration that the lid will be held tightly down as East-West contacts increase, they do strongly suggest that the Soviets and those who collaborate with them will not allow their desire for detente to get in the way of their continued control or to cause them to treat gently those who try to undermine the political system.

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8 September 1972

MEMORANDUM FOR:
John Huizenga

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